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AN  
ESSAY  
ON  
CRITICISM.

BY  
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Written in the year M D C C I X.

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A N  
E S S A Y  
O N  
C R I T I C I S M.

'T IS hard to say, if greater want of skill  
 Appear in writing or in judging ill;  
 But of the two, less dang'rous is th' offence  
 To tire our patience, than mislead our sense.  
 Some few in that, but numbers err in this, 5  
 Ten censure wrong for one who writes amiss;  
 A fool might once himself alone expose,  
 Now one in verse makes many more in prose.

8 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none  
Go just alike, yet each believes his own. 10

In Poets as true Genius is but rare,  
True Taste as seldom is the Critic's share;  
Both must alike from Heav'n derive their light,  
These born to judge, as well as those to write.  
Let such teach others who themselves excel, 15  
And censure freely who have written well.

Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,  
But are not Critics to their judgment too?

Yet if we look more closely, we shall find  
Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind: 20

VER. 15. *Let such teach others*] " Qui scribit artificiose, ab  
" aliis commode scripta facile intelligere poterit." Cic. ad  
Herenn. lib. iv. " De pictore, sculptore, fictore, nisi artifex, ju-  
" dicare non potest." Pliny.

VER. 20. *Most have the seeds*] " Omnes tacito quodam sen-  
" su, sine ulla arte, aut ratione, quæ sint in artibus ac rationi-  
" bus recta et prava dijudicant" Cic. de Orat. lib. iii.





# ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 9

Nature affords at least a glimm'ring light;  
 The lines, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right.  
 But as the slightest sketch, if justly trac'd,  
 Is by ill-colouring but the more disgrac'd,  
 So by false learning is good sense defac'd:  
 Some are bewilder'd in the maze of schools, 26  
 And some made coxcombs Nature meant but fools,  
 In search of wit these lose their common sense,  
 And then turn Critics in their own defence:  
 Each burns alike, who can, or cannot write, 39  
 Or with a Rival's, or an Eunuch's spite.

Between ver. 25 and 26 were these lines omitted by the author:

Many are spoil'd by that pedantic throng,  
 Who with great pains teach youth to reason wrong.  
 Tutors, like Virtuoso's, oft inclin'd  
 By strange transfusion to improve the mind,  
 Draw off the sense we have, to pour in new;  
 Which yet, with all their skill, they ne'er could do.

VER. 25. *So by false learning*] "Plus sine doctrina prudentia, quam sine prudentia valet doctrina." Quint.



10 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

All fools have still an itching to deride,  
And fain would be upon the laughing side.  
If Maevius scribble in Apollo's spight,  
There are, who judge still worfe than he can write.

Some have at first for Wits, then Poets past, 36  
Turn'd Critics next, and prov'd plain fools at last.

Some neither can for Wits nor Critics pass,  
As heavy mules are neither horse nor ass.  
Those half-learn'd witlings, num'rous in our isle,  
As half-form'd insects on the banks of Nile; 41

Unfinish'd things, one knows not what to call,  
Their generation's so equivocal:  
To tell 'em, would a hundred tongues require,  
Or one vain wit's, that might a hundred tire. 45

But you who seek to give and merit fame,  
And justly bear a Critic's noble name,

Be sure

Be sure yourself and your own reach to know,  
 How far your genius, taste, and learning go;  
 Launch not beyond your depth, but be discreet, 50  
 And mark that point where sense and dulness meet.

Nature to all things fix'd the limits fit,  
 And wisely curb'd proud man's pretending wit.  
 As on the land while here the ocean gains,  
 In other parts it leaves wide sandy plains; 55  
 Thus in the soul where memory prevails,  
 The solid pow'r of understanding fails;  
 Where beams of warm imagination play,  
 The memory's soft figures melt away.  
 One science only will one genius fit; 60  
 So vast is art, so narrow human wit:  
 Not only bounded to peculiar arts,  
 But oft' in those confin'd to single parts.

12      ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Like Kings we lose the conquests gain'd before,  
 By vain ambition still to make them more:      65  
 Each might his sev'ral province well command,  
 Would all but stoop to what they understand.

First follow Nature, and your judgment frame  
 By her just standard, which is still the same;  
 Unerring NATURE, still divinely bright,      70  
 One clear, unchang'd, and universal light,  
 Life, force and beauty, must to all impart,  
 At once the source, and end, and test of Art.  
 Art from that fund each just supply provides;  
 Works without show, and without pomp presides:  
 In some fair body thus th' informing soul      76  
 With spirits feeds, with vigour fills the whole,  
 Each motion guides, and ev'ry nerve sustains;  
 Itself unseen, but in th' effects remains.

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 13

Some, to whom Heav'n in wit has been profuse, 80

Want as much more, to turn it to its use;

For wit and judgment often are at strife,

Tho' meant each other's aid, like man and wife.

'Tis more to guide, than spur the Muse's speed;

Restrain his fury than provoke his speed; 85

The winged courser, like a gen'rous horse,

Shows most true mettle when you check his course.

Those RULES of old discover'd, not devis'd,

Are nature still, but nature methodiz'd;

Nature, like Liberty, is but restrain'd

By the same laws which first herself ordain'd. 90

Hear how learn'd Greece her useful rules indites,

When to repress, and when indulge our flights:

VARIATIONS.

VER. 80.

There are whom Heav'n has blest with store of wit,  
Yet want as much again to manage it.



14 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

High on Parnassus' top her sons she show'd,  
 And pointed out those arduous paths they trod; 95  
 Held from afar, aloft, th' immortal prize,  
 And urg'd the rest by equal steps to rise.  
 Just precepts thus from great examples giv'n,  
 She drew from them what they deriv'd from Heav'n,  
 The gen'rous Critic fann'd the Poet's fire, 100  
 And taught the world with reason to admire.  
 Then Criticism the Muses handmaid prov'd,  
 To dress her charms, and make her more belov'd;  
 But following wits from that intention stray'd,  
 Who could not win the mistress, woo'd the maid;  
 Against the Poets their own arms they turn'd, 106  
 Sure to hate most the men from whom they learn'd.

VER. 98. *Just precepts*] "Nec enim artibus editis factum est  
 "ut argumenta inveniremus, sed dicta sunt omnia antequam  
 "præciperentur; mox ea scriptores observata et collecta edide-  
 "runt." Quintil.



ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 15

So modern 'Pothecaries, taught the art  
By Doctor's bills to play the Doctor's part,  
Bold in the practice of mistaken rules, 110  
Prescribe, apply, and call their masters fools.  
Some on the leaves of antient authors prey,  
Nor time nor moths e'er spoil'd so much as they.  
Some drily plain, without invention's aid,  
Write dull receipts how poems may be made. 115  
These leave the sense, their learning to display,  
And those explain the meaning quite away. [steer,  
You then whose judgment the right course would  
Know well each ANCIENT's proper character;  
His Fable, Subject, scope in ev'ry page; 120  
Religion, Country, genius of his Age:

16 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Without all these at once before your eyes,

Cavil you may, but never criticize.

Be Homer's works your study and delight,

Read them by day, and meditate by night; 125

Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims

And trace the Muses upward to their spring. [bring,

Still with itself compar'd, his text peruse;

And let your comment be the Mantuan Muse.

VER. 123. *Cavil you may, but never criticize.*] The Author after this verse originally inserted the following, which he has however omitted in all the editions:

Zoilus, had these been known, without a name  
Had dy'd, and Perault ne'er been damn'd to fame;  
The sense of sound Antiquity had reign'd,  
And sacred Homer yet been unprophan'd.  
None e'er had thought his comprehensive mind  
To modern customs, modern rules confin'd;  
Who for all ages writ, and all mankind.

}

When first young Maro in his boundless mind  
 A work t' outlast immortal Rome design'd, 131  
 Perhaps he seem'd above the Critic's law,  
 And but from Nature's fountains scorn'd to draw:  
 But when t' examine ev'ry part he came,  
 Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.  
 Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold design;  
 And rules as strict his labour'd work confine,  
 As if the Stagarite o'erlook'd each line.  
 Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;  
 To copy nature is to copy them. 140

VARIATIONS.

VER. 130.

When first young Maro sung of Kings and Wars,  
 Ere warning Phoebus touch'd his trembling ears,

VER. 130. *When first young Maro, etc.*] Virg. Eclog. vi.

Cum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthia aurem  
 Vellit.

It is a tradition preserved by Servius, that Virgil began with writing a poem on the Alban and Roman affairs; which he found above his years, and descended first to imitate Theocritus on rural subjects, and afterwards to copy Homer in Heroic poetry.

18 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Some beauties yet no Precepts can declare,  
 For there's a happiness as well as care.  
 Music resembles Poetry, in each  
 Are nameless graces which no methods teach,  
 And which a master-hand alone can reach. 145  
 If, where the rules not far enough extend,  
 (Since rules were made but to promote their end)  
 Some lucky Licence answers to the full  
 Th' intent propos'd, that Licence is a rule.  
 Thus Pegasus, a nearer way to take, 150  
 May boldly deviate from the common track;  
 From vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,  
 And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art,

VER. 146. *If, where the rules, etc.*] " Neque enim rogationi-  
 " bus plebisve scitis sancta sunt ista praecepta, sed hoc, quicquid  
 " est, Utilitas excogitavit. Non negabo autem sic utile esse ple-  
 " rumque; verum si eadem illa nobis aliud suadebit Utilitas, hanc,  
 " relictis magistrorum autoritatibus, sequemur. Quintil. lib. ii.  
 " cap. 13."

Which,



Which, without passing thro' the judgment, gains  
The heart, and all its end at once attains. 155

In prospects thus, some objects please our eyes, }  
Which out of nature's common order rise, }  
The shapeless rock, or hanging precipice. }

Great Wits sometimes may gloriously offend,  
And rise to faults true Critics dare not mend. 160

But tho' the Ancients thus their rules invade,  
(As Kings dispense with laws themselves have made)

Moderns, beware! or if you must offend  
Against the precept, ne'er transgress its End;

Let it be seldom, and compell'd by need; 165 -  
And have, at least, their precedent to plead.

The Critic else proceeds without remorse,  
Seizes your fame, and puts his laws in force.

I know there are, to whose presumptuous thoughts  
 Those freer beauties, ev'n in them, seem faults. 170  
 Some figures monstrous and mis-shap'd appear,  
 Consider'd singly, or beheld too near,  
 Which, but proportion'd to their light, or place,  
 Due distance reconciles to form and grace.  
 A prudent chief not always must display      175  
 His pow'rs in equal ranks, and fair array,  
 But with th' occasion and the place comply,  
 Conceal his force, nay seem sometimes to fly.  
 Those oft are stratagems which errors seem,  
 Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.      180

Ver. 180. *Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.*] Mode-  
 ste, et circumspécto iudicio de tantis viris pronuntiandum est,  
 ne (quod plerisque accidit) damnent quod non intelligunt. Ac  
 si necesse est in alteram errare partem, omnia eorum legentibus  
 placere, quam multa displicere maluerim." Quintil.

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 21

Still green with bays each ancient Altar stands,  
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands;  
Secure from flames, from Envy's fiercer rage,  
Destructive War, and all involving Age.  
See from each clime the learn'd their incense bring!  
Hear, in all tongues consenting Paeans ring! 186  
In praise so just let ev'ry voice be join'd,  
And fill the gen'ral chorus of mankind.  
Hail, Bards triumphant! born in happier days;  
Immortal heirs of universal praise! 190  
Whose honours with increase of ages grow,  
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow;  
Nations unborn your mighty names shall sound,  
And worlds applaud that must not yet be found!  
Oh may some spark of your celestial fire, 195  
The last, the meanest of your sons inspire.

22      ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

(That on weak wings, from far, pursues your flights;  
Glow while he reads, but trembles as he writes)  
To teach vain Wits a science little known,  
T' admire superior sense, and doubt their own! 200

Of all the causes which conspire to blind  
Man's erring judgment, and misguide the mind,  
What the weak head with strongest bias rules,  
Is *Pride*, the never-failing vice of fools.

Whatever Nature has in worth deny'd,      205  
She gives in large recruits of needful pride;  
For as in bodies, thus in souls, we find  
What wants in blood and spirits, swell'd with wind:  
Pride, where Wit fails, steps in to our defence,  
And fills up all the mighty Void of sense.      210  
If once right reason drives that cloud away,  
Truth breaks upon us with resistless day.



ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 23

Trust not yourself; but your defects to know,  
Make use of every friend——and ev'ry foe.

A little learning is a dang'rous thing; 215

Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:

There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,

And drinking largely sobers us again.

Fir'd at first sight with what the Muse imparts,

In fearless youth we tempt the heights of Arts, 220

While from the bounded level of our mind,

Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind;

But more advanc'd, behold with strange surprize

New distant scenes of endless science rise !

So pleas'd at first the tow'ring Alps we try, 225

Mount o'er the vales, and seem to tread the sky,

VARIATIONS.

VER. 225.

So pleas'd at first the tow'ring Alps to try,  
Fill'd with ideas of fair Italy,

24      ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Th' eternal snows appear already past,  
 And the first clouds and mountains seem the last:  
 But, those attain'd, we tremble to survey  
 The growing labours of the lengthen'd way,    230  
 Th' increasing prospect tires our wand'ring eyes,  
 Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps arise.

    A perfect Judge will read each work of Wit  
 With the same spirit that its author writ:  
 Survey the WHOLE, nor seek slight faults to find    235  
 Where nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;  
 Nor lose for that malignant dull delight,  
 The gen'rous pleasure to be charm'd with wit.  
 But in such lays as neither ebb nor flow,  
 Correctly cold and regularly low,                      240

    The Traveller beholds with chearful eyes  
 The less'ning vales, and seems to tread the skies.

That shunning faults, one quiet tenour keep;

We cannot blame indeed—but we may sleep.

In Wit, as Nature, what affects our hearts

Is not th' exactness of peculiar parts;

'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call, 245

But the joint force and full result of all.

Thus when we view some well-proportion'd dome,

(The world's just wonder, and ev'n thine, O Rome !)

No single parts unequally surprize,

All comes united to th' admiring eyes; 250

No monstrous height, or breadth, or length appear;

The Whole at once is bold, and regular.

Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,

Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.

In ev'ry work regard the writer's End, 255

Since none can compass more than they intend;

26 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

And if the means be just, the conduct true,  
 Applause, in spite of trivial faults, is due.  
 As men of breeding, sometimes men of wit,  
 T' avoid great errors, must the less commit: 260  
 Neglect the rules each verbal Critic lays,  
 For not to know some trifles is a praise.  
 Most Critics, fond of some subservient art,  
 Still make the Whole depend upon a Part:  
 They talk of principles, but notions prize, 265  
 And all to one lov'd Folly sacrifice.

Once on a time, La Mancha's Knight, they say,  
 A certain Bard encount'ring on the way,  
 Discours'd in terms as just, with looks as sage,  
 As e'er could Dennis, of the Grecian stage; 270  
 Concluding all were desp'rate fots and fools,  
 Who durst depart from Aristotle's rules.

Our



Our Author, happy in a judge so nice,  
 Produc'd his Play, and begg'd the Knight's advice;  
 Made him observe the subject and the plot, 275  
 The manners, passions, unities; what not?  
 All which, exact to rule, were brought about,  
 Were but a Combat in the lists left out.

"What! leave the Combat out?" exclaims the Knight;  
 Yes, or we must renounce the Stagirite. 280

"Not so by Heav'n" (he answers in a rage)

"Knights, squires, and steeds, must enter on the  
 So vast a throng the stage can ne'er contain. [stage."

"Then build a new, or act it in a plain."

Thus Critics of less judgment than caprice, 285

Curious not knowing, not exact but nice,

Form short Ideas; and offend in arts

(As most in manners) by a love to parts.

Some to *Conceit* alone their taste confine,  
 And glit'ring thoughts struck out at ev'ry line; 290  
 Pleas'd with a work where nothing's just or fit;  
 One glaring Chaos and wild heap of wit.  
 Poets like painters, thus, unskill'd to trace  
 The naked nature and the living grace,  
 With gold and jewels cover ev'ry part, 295  
 And hide with ornaments their want of art.  
 True wit is Nature to advantage drefs'd,  
 What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd;  
 Something, whose truth convinc'd at sight we find,  
 That gives us back the image of our mind. 300  
 As shades more sweetly recommend the light,  
 So modest plainness sets off sprightly wit.  
 For works may have more wit than does 'em good,  
 As bodies perish thro' excess of blood.

Others for *Language* all their care express, 305  
 And value books, as women men, for dress :  
 Their praise is still,----the Style is excellent ;  
 The Sense, they humbly take upon content.  
 Words are like leaves ; and where they most abound,  
 Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found : 310  
 False eloquence, like the prismatic glass,  
 Its gaudy colours spreads on ev'ry place ;  
 The face of Nature we no more survey,  
 All glares alike, without distinction gay : 314  
 But true Expression, like th' unchanging sun,  
 Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon,  
 It gilds all objects, but it alters none.  
Expression is the dress of thought, and still  
Appears more decent, as more suitable ;

A vile conceit in pompous words express'd      320

Is like a clown in regal purple dress'd:

For diff'rent styles with diff'rent subjects sort,

As sev'ral garbs with country, town, and court.

Some by old words to fame have made pretence,

Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense;

Such labour'd nothings, in so strange a style,      326

Amaze th' unlearn'd, and make the learned smile.

Unlucky, as Fungoso in the Play,      }

These sparks with aukward vanity display      }

What the fine gentleman wore yesterday;      330 }

VER. 324. *Some by old words, etc.*] "Abolita et abrogata rei-  
nere, insolentiae cujusdam est, et frivola in parvis jactantiae."  
Quint. lib. i. c. 6.

"Opus est, ut verba a vetustate repetita neque crebra sint, ne-  
que manifesta, quia nil est odiosius affectatione, nec utique ab ul-  
timis repetita temporibus. Oratio cujus summa virtus est per-  
spicuitas, quam sit vitiosa, si egeat interprete? Ergo ut novo-  
rum optima erunt maxime vetera, ita veterum maxime nova."  
Idem.

VER. 328.—*Unlucky, as Fungoso, etc.*] See Ben. Johnson's E-  
very Man in his Humour.



And but so mimic antient wits at best,  
 As apes our grandsires, in their doublets drest.  
 In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold;  
 Alike fantastic, if too new, or old:  
 Be not the first by whom the new are try'd, 335  
 Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

But most by *numbers* judge a Poet's song,  
 And smooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong:  
 In the bright Muse tho' thousand charms conspire,  
 Her voice is all these tuneful fools admire; 340  
 Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear,  
 Not mend their minds; as some to Church repair,  
 Not for the doctrine, but the music there.

VER. 337. *But most by numbers, etc.*]

Quis populi sermo est? quis enim? nisi carmina molli  
 Nunc demum numero fluere, ut per lævè severos  
 Effundat junctura unguis: scit tendere versum  
 Non secus ac si oculo rubricam dirigat uno. Pers. Sat. i.

These equal syllables alone require,  
 Tho' oft the ear the open vowels tire;                    345  
 While expletives their feeble aid do join;  
 And ten low words oft creep in one dull line :  
 While they ring round the same unvary'd chimes,  
 With sure returns of still expected rhymes;  
 Where-e'er you find " the cooling western breeze,"  
 In the next line, it " whispers thro' the trees:" 351  
 If crystal streams " with pleasing murmurs creep,"  
 The reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with " sleep :"  
 Then, at the last and only couplet fraught  
 With some unmeaning thing they call a thought, 355  
 A needless Alexandrine ends the song,                    [along.  
 That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length

VER. 345. *Tho' oft the ear, etc.*] " Fugiemus crebras vocalium  
 " concursiones, quae vastam atque hiantem orationem reddunt."  
 Cic. ad. Heren. lib. iv. Vide etiam Quintil. lib. ix. c. 4.

Leave such to tune their own dull rhymes, and know  
 What's roundly smooth, or languishingly slow;  
 And praise the easy vigour of a line, [join.  
 Where Denham's strength, and Waller's sweetness  
 True ease in writing comes from art, not chance, 364  
 As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.  
 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,  
 The sound must seem an Echo to the sense: 365  
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,  
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;  
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,  
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar;  
When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw,  
The line too labours, and the words move slow: 371  
 Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain, [main.  
Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the

Hear how Timotheus' vary'd lays surprize,  
 And bid alternate passions fall and rise;  
 While at each change, the son of Libyan Jove  
 Now burns with glory, and then melts with love;  
 Now his fierce eyes with sparkling fury glow,  
 Now sighs steel out, and tears begin to flow;  
 Persians and Greeks like turns of nature found,  
 And the world's victor stood subdu'd by sound;  
 The pow'r of Music all our hearts allow,  
 And what Timotheus was, is DRYDEN now.

Avoid Extremes; and shun the fault of such,  
 Who still are pleas'd too little or too much,  
At ev'ry trifle scorn to take offence,  
That always shews great pride, or little sense;

VER. 374. *Hear how Timotheus, etc.*] See Alexander's Feast,  
 or the Power of Music; an Ode by Mr. Dryden.

Those



Those heads, as stomachs, are not sure the best,  
Which nauseate all, and nothing can digest.

Yet let not each gay Turn thy rapture move; 390  
For fools admire, but men of sense approve:  
As things seem large which we thro' mists descry,  
Dulness is ever apt to magnify.

Some foreign writers, some our own despise;  
The Ancients only, or the Moderns prize. 395  
Thus Wit, like Faith, by each man is apply'd  
To one small sect, and all are damn'd beside.

Meanly they seek the blessing to confine,  
And force that sun but on a part to shine,  
Which not alone the southern wit sublimes, 400  
But ripens spirits in cold northern climes;  
Which from the first has shone on ages past,  
Enlights the present, and shall warm the last;

36      ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Tho' each may feel encreases and decays,  
 And see now clearer and now darker days.      405  
 Regard not then if Wit be old or new,  
 But blame the false, and value still the true.

Some ne'er advance a Judgment of their own.  
 But catch the spreading notion of the Town;  
 They reason and conclude by precedent,      410  
 And own stale nonsense which they ne'er invent.  
 Some judge of authors names, not works, and then  
 Nor praise nor blame the writings, but the men.  
 Of all this servile herd, the worst is he  
 That in proud dulness joins with Quality.      415  
 A constant Critic at the great man's board,  
 To fetch and carry nonsense for my Lord.  
 What woful stuff this madrigal would be,  
 In some starv'd hackney sonneteer, or me?

ESSAY ON CRITICISM. 37

But let a Lord once own the happy lines, 420

How the wit brightens! how the style refines!

Before his sacred name flies ev'ry fault,

And each exalted stanza teems with thought!

The Vulgar thus through Imitation err;

As oft the Learn'd by being singular; 425

So much they scorn the croud, that if the throng

By chance go right, they purpofely go wrong:

So Schismatics the plain believers quit,

And are but damn'd for having too much wit.

Some praise at morning what they blame at night;

But always think the last opinion right. 431

A Muse by these is like a mistress us'd,

This hour she's idoliz'd, the next abus'd;

While their weak heads like towns unfortify'd,

'Twixt sense and nonsense daily change their side.

Ask them the cause; they're wiser still, they say;

And still to-morrow's wiser than to-day.

We think our fathers fools; so wise we grow;

Our wiser sons, no doubt, will think us so.    439

Once School-divines this zealous isle o'erspread;

Who knew most Sentences, was deepest read;

Faith, Gospel, all, seem'd made to be disputed,

And none had sense enough to be confuted:

Scotists and Thomists, now in peace remain,

Amidst their kindred cobwebs in Duck-lane.    445

If Faith itself has diff'rent dresses worn,

What wonder modes in Wit should take their turn?

VER. 445. *Duck-lane.*] A place where old and second-hand books were sold formerly, near Smithfield.

#### VARIATIONS.

VER. 447. Between this and ver. 448.

The rhyming Clowns that gladdened Shakespear's age,  
No more with crambo entertain the stage.



Of't, leaving what is natural and fit,  
 The current folly proves the ready wit;  
 And authors think their reputation safe, 450  
 Which lives as long as fools are pleas'd to laugh.

Some valuing those of their own side or mind,  
 Still make themselves the measure of mankind:  
 Fondly we think we honour merit then,  
 When we but praise ourselves in other men. 455

Parties in Wit attend on those of State,  
 And public faction doubles private hate.  
 Pride, Malice, Folly, against Dryden rose,  
 In various shapes of Parsons, Critics, Beaus;

Who now in Anagrams their Patron praise,  
 Or sing their Mistrefs in Acrostic lays?  
 Ev'n pulpits pleas'd with merry puns of yore;  
 Now all are banish'd to th' Hibernian shore!  
 Thus leaving what was natural and fit,  
 The current folly prov'd their ready wit;  
 And authors thought their reputation safe,  
 Which liv'd as long as fools were pleas'd to laugh.

40    ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

But sense surviv'd when merry jests were past; 460

For rising merit will buoy up at last.

Might he return and bless once more our eyes,

New Blackmores and new Milbourns must arise:

Nay should great Homer lift his awful head,

Zoilus again would start up from the dead. 465

Envy will merit, as its shade pursue;

But like a shadow, proves the Substance true:

For envy'd Wit, like Sol eclips'd, makes known

Th' opposing body's grossness, not its own.

When first the sun too pow'rful beams displays,

It draws up vapours which obscure its rays; 471

But ev'n those clouds at last adorn its way;

Reflect new glories, and augment the day.

Be thou the first true merit to befriend;

His praise is lost, who stays 'till all commend. 475

Short is the date, alas, of modern rhymes,  
 And 'tis but just to let them live betimes.  
 No longer now that golden age appears,  
 When Patriarch wits surviv'd a thousand years:  
 Now length of Fame (our second life) is lost, 480  
 And bare threescore is all ev'n that can boast;  
 Our sons their father's failing language see,  
 And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be.  
 So when the faithful pencil has design'd  
 Some bright Idea of the master's mind, 485  
 Where a new world leaps out at his command,  
 And ready Nature waits upon his hand:  
 When the ripe colours soften and unite,  
 And sweetly melt into just shade and light;  
 When mellowing years their full perfection give,  
 And each bold figure just begins to live, 491

42      ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

The treach'rous colours the fair art betray,  
And all the bright creation fades away!

Unhappy Wit, like most mistaken things,  
Attunes not for that envy which it brings.      495

In youth alone its empty praise we boast,  
But soon the short-liv'd vanity is lost:

Like some fair flow'r the early spring supplies,  
That gayly blooms, but ev'n in blooming dies.

What is this Wit, which must our cares employ?

The owner's wife that other men enjoy;      501

Then most our trouble still when most admir'd,

And still the more we give, the more requir'd;

Whose fame with pains we guard, but lose with ease,

Sure some to vex, but never all to please;      505

'Tis what the vicious fear, the virtuous shun,

By fools 'tis hated, and by knaves undone!

If



If Wit so much from Ign'rance undergo,  
 Ah let not Learning too commence its foe!  
 Of old, those met rewards who could excell, 510  
 And such were prais'd who but endeavour'd well:  
 Tho' triumphs were to gen'als only due,  
 Crowns were reserv'd to grace the soldiers too.  
 Now, they who reach Parnassus' lofty crown,  
 Employ their pains to spurn some others down; 515  
 And while self-love each jealous writer rules,  
 Contending wits become the sport of fools:  
 But still the worst with most regret commend,  
 For each ill Author is as bad a Friend.  
 To what base ends, and by what abject ways, 520  
 Are mortals urg'd thro' sacred lust of praise!  
 Ah ne'er so dire a thirst of glory boast,  
 Nor in the Critic let the Man be lost.

44    ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Good-nature and good-sense must ever join;  
To err is human, to forgive, divine.                    525

But if in noble minds some dregs remain,  
Not yet purg'd off, of spleen and sour disdain;  
Discharge that rage on more provoking crimes,  
Nor fear a dearth in these flagitious times.

No pardon vile Obscenity should find,                    530

Tho' wit and art conspire to move your mind;

But Dulness with Obscenity must prove

As shameful sure as Impotence in love.

In the fat age of pleasure, wealth, and ease, [crease:

Sprung the rank weed, and thriv'd with large in-

When love was all an easy Monarch's care;                    536

Seldom at council, never in a war:

Jilts rul'd the state, and statesmen farces writ;

Nay wits had pensions, and young Lords had wit:

The Fair fate panting at a Courtier's play, 540

And not a Mask went unimprov'd away:

The modest fan was lifted up no more,

And Virgins smil'd at what they blush'd before.

The following licence of a foreign reign

Did all the dregs of bold Socinus drain; 545

Then unbelieving Priests reform'd the nation,

And taught more pleasant methods of salvation;

Where Heav'n's free subjects might their rights dispute,

Left God himself should seem too absolute:

Pulpits their sacred satire learn'd to spare, 550

And Vice admir'd to find a flatt'rer there!

Encourag'd thus, Wit's Titans brav'd the skies,

And the prefs groan'd with licens'd blasphemies.

VER. 547. The author has omitted two lines which stood here, as containing a National Reflection, which in his stricter judgment he could not but disapprove on any People whatever.

46    ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

These monsters, Critics! with your darts engage,  
 Here point your thunder, and exhaust your rage!  
 Yet shun their fault, who, scandalously nice,    556  
 Will needs mistake an author into vice;  
 All seems infected that th' infected spy,  
 As all looks yellow to the jaundic'd eye.    559

LEARN then what MORALS Critics ought to show,  
 For 'tis but half a Judge's task to know.  
 'Tis not enough, taste, judgment, learning, join;  
 In all you speak, let truth and candour shine:  
 That not alone what to your sense is due  
 All may allow; but seek your friendship too.    565

Be silent always, when you doubt your sense;  
 And speak, tho' sure, with seeming diffidence:  
 Some positive, persisting fops we know,  
 Who, if once wrong, will needs be always so;



But you, with pleasure own your errors past, 570

And make each day a Critique on the last.

'Tis not enough your counsel still be true;  
Blunt truths more mischief than nice falsehoods do;  
Men must be taught as if you taught them not,  
And things unknown propos'd as things forgot. 575

Without Good-Breeding, truth is disapprov'd;  
That only makes superior sense belov'd.

Be niggards of advice on no pretence :  
For the worst avarice is that of sense.  
With mean complacence ne'er betray your trust, 580  
Nor be so civil as to prove unjust.  
Fear not the anger of the wise to raise;  
Those best can bear reproof, who merit praise.

'Twere well might Critics still this freedom take,  
But Appius reddens at each word you speak, 585

And stares, tremendous, with a threat'ning eye,  
 Like some fierce tyrant in old tapestry.  
 Fear most to tax an honourable fool,  
 Whose right it is, uncensur'd, to be dull;  
 Such, without wit, are poets when they please, 590  
 As without learning they can take Degrees.  
 Leave dang'rous truths to unsuccessful Satires,  
 And flattery to fulsome Dedicators,  
 Whom, when they praise, the world believes no more,  
 Than when they promise to give scribbling o'er. 595  
 'Tis best sometimes your censure to restrain,  
 And charitably let the dull be vain:

VER. 586. *And stares, tremendous, etc.*] This picture was taken to himself by John Dennis, a furious old Critic by profession, who, upon no other provocation, wrote against this Essay and its author, in a manner perfectly lunatic: For, as to the mention made of him in ver. 270, he took it as a compliment, and said it was treacherously meant to cause him to overlook this *Abuse of his Person*.

Your silence there is better than your spite,  
 For who can rail so long as they can write?  
 Still humming on, their drouzy course they keep,  
 And lash'd so long, like tops, are lash'd asleep. 601  
 False steps but help them to renew the race,  
 As, after stumbling, Jades will mend their pace.  
 What crouds of these, impenitently bold,  
 In sounds and jingling syllables grown old, 605  
 Still run on Poets, in a raging vein,  
 Ev'n to the dregs and squeezings of the brain;  
 Strain out the last dull droppings of their sense,  
 And rhyme with all the rage of Impotence.

Such shameless Bards we have; and yet 'tis true,  
 There are as mad, abandon'd Critics too. 611  
 The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,  
 With loads of learned lumber in his head,

With his own tongue still edifies his ears,  
 And always list'ning to himself appears.      615  
 All books he reads, and all he reads assails,  
 From Dryden's Fables down to Dufsey's Tales.  
 With him most authors steal their works, or buy;  
 Garth did not write his own Dispensary.  
 Name a new Play, and he's the Poet's friend, 620  
 Nay show'd his faults---but when would Poets mend?  
 No place so sacred from such fops is barr'd, [yard:  
 Nor is Paul's church more safe than Paul's church-  
 Nay, fly to Altars; there they'll talk you dead;  
 For Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread. 625

VER. 620. *Garth did not write, etc.*] A common slander at that time in prejudice of that deserving author. Our Poet did him this justice, when that slander most prevailed; and it is now (perhaps the sooner for this very verse) dead and forgotten.

## VARIATIONS.

VER. 624. Between this and ver. 625.

In vain you shrug and sweat, and strive to fly;  
 These know no Manners but of Poetry.

Distrustful



Distrustful sense with modest caution speaks, }  
 It still looks home, and short excursions makes; }  
 But ratling nonsense in full vollies breaks, }  
 And never shock'd, and never turn'd aside,  
 Bursts out, resistless, with a thund'ring tide. 630

But where's the man, who counsel can bestow,  
 Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?  
 Unbias'd, or by favour, or by spite;  
 Not dully prepossess'd, nor blindly right; 634  
 Tho' learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, sincere;  
 Modestly bold, and humanly severe;  
 Who to a friend his faults can freely show,  
 And gladly praise the merit of a foe?  
 Blest with a taste exact, yet unconfin'd;  
 A knowlege both of books and human kind; 640

They'll stop a hungry Chaplain in his grace,  
 To treat of Unities of time and place.

52      ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Gen'rous converse; a soul exempt from pride;  
And love to praise, with reason on his side?

Such once were Critics; such the happy few,  
Athens and Rome in better ages knew.

The mighty Stagirite first left the shore,                      645

Spread all his sails, and durst the deeps explore;

He steer'd securely, and discover'd far,

Led by the light of the Maeonian star.

Poets, a race long unconfin'd, and free,

Still fond and proud of savage liberty,                      650

VARIATIONS.

Between ver. 646 and 647, I found the following lines since  
supprest by the author:

That bold Columbus of the realms of wit,  
Whose first discovery's not exceeded yet.  
Led by the light of the Maeonian Star,  
He steer'd securely, and discover'd far.  
He, when all Nature was subdu'd before,  
Like his great Pupil, sigh'd and long'd for more:  
Fancy's wild regions yet unvanquish'd lay,  
A boundless empire, and that own'd no sway.  
Poets, etc.

Receiv'd his laws; and stood convinc'd 'twas fit,  
Who conquer'd Nature, should preside o'er wit.

Horace still charms with graceful negligence,  
And without method talks us into sense,

Will, like a friend, familiarly convey 655

The truest notions in the easiest way.

He, who supreme in judgment, as in wit,

Might boldly censure, as he boldly writ,

Yet judg'd with coolness, tho' he sung with fire;

His Precepts teach but what his works inspire. 660

Our critics take a contrary extreme,

They judge with fury, but they write with flegm:

Nor suffers Horace more in wrong Translations

By Wits, than Critics in as wrong Quotations.

54    ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

See Dionysius Homer's thoughts refine,    665  
And call new beauties forth from ev'ry line!

Fancy and art in gay Petronious please,  
The scholar's learning, with the courtier's ease.

In grave Quintilian's copious work, we find  
The justest rules, and clearest method join'd: 670  
Thus useful arms in magazines we place,  
All rang'd in order, and dispos'd with grace,  
But less to please the eye, than arm the hand,  
Still fit for use, and ready at command.

Thee, bold Longinus! all the nine inspire, 675  
And bless their Critic with a Poet's fire.  
An ardent Judge, who zealous in his trust,  
With warmth gives sentence, yet is always just;



Whose own example strengthens all his laws ;  
And is himself that great Sublime he draws. 680

Thus long succeeding Critics justly reign'd,  
Licence repress'd, and useful laws ordain'd,  
Learning and Rome alike in empire grew ;  
And arts still follow'd where her eagles flew ; 684  
From the same foes, at last, both felt their doom,  
And the same age saw Learning fall, and Rome.  
With Tyranny, then Superstition join'd,  
As that the body, this enslav'd the mind ;  
Much was believ'd, but little understood,  
And to be dull was constru'd to be good ; 690  
A second deluge Learning thus o'er-run,  
And the Monks finish'd what the Goths begun.

VARIATIONS.

Between ver. 690 and 691, the author omitted these two,  
Vain Wits and Critics were no more allow'd,  
When none but Saints had licence to be proud.

56      ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

At length Erasmus, that great injur'd name,  
 (The glory of the Priesthood, and the shame!)  
 Stem'd the wild torrent of a barb'rous age,      695  
 And drove those holy Vandals off the stage.

But see! each Muse, in LEO's golden days,  
 Starts from her trance, and trims her wither'd bays!  
 Rome's ancient Genius, o'er its ruins spread,  
 Shakes off the dust, and rears his rev'rend head. 700  
 Then sculpture and her sister-arts revive;  
 Stones leap'd to form, and rocks began to live;  
 With sweeter notes each rising Temple rung;  
 A Raphael painted, and a Vida sung.

Immortal Vida! on whose honour'd brow      705  
 The Poet's bays and Critic's ivy grow:  
 Cremona now shall ever boast thy name,  
 As next in place to Mantua, next in fame!

But soon by impious arms from Latium chas'd,  
 Their ancient bounds the banish'd Muses pass'd; 710  
 Thence Arts o'er all the northern world advance;  
 But Critic-learning flourish'd most in France:  
 The rules a nation, born to serve, obeys;  
 And Boileau still in right of Horace sways.  
 But we, brave Britons, foreign laws despis'd, 715  
 And kept unconquer'd and unciviliz'd;  
 Fierce for the liberties of wit, and bold,  
 We still defy'd the Romans, as of old.  
 Yet some there were, among the founder few  
 Of those who less presum'd, and better knew, 720  
 Who durst assert the juster ancient cause,  
 And here restor'd Wit's fundamental laws.

## 58 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Such was the Muse, whose rules and practice tell,  
 "Nature's chief Master-piece is writing well."

VER. 723. *Such was the Muse*—] Essay on Poetry by the Duke of Buckingham. Our Poet is not the only one of his time who complimented this Essay, and its noble Autl.or. Mr. Dryden had done it very largely in the Dedication to his translation of the *Aeneid*; and Dr. Garth in the first Edition of his *Dispensary* says,

The Tyber now no courtly Gallus fees,  
 But smiling Thames enjoys his Normanbys.

Tho' afterwards omitted, when parties were carried so high in the reign of Queen Anne, as to allow no commendation to an opposite in Politics. The duke was all his life a steady adherent to the Church of England-Party, yet an Enemy to the extravagant measures of the Court in the reign of Charles II. On which account, after having strongly patronized Mr. Dryden, a coolness succeeded between them on that poet's absolute attachment to the Court, which carried him some lengths beyond what the Duke could approve of. This nobleman's true character had been very well marked by Mr. Dryden before,

The Muse's friend,  
 Himself a Muse. In Sanadrin's debate  
 True to his prince, but not a slave of state,

Abf. and Achit.

Our Author was more happy; he was honoured very young with his friendship, and it continued till his death in all the circumstances of a familiar esteem.

Such



Such was Roscommon, not more learn'd than good,  
 With manners gen'rous as his noble blood; 726  
 To him the wit of Greece and Rome was known,  
 And ev'ry author's merit, but his own.

Such late was Walsb---the Muse's judge and friend,  
 Who justly knew to blame or to commend; 730  
 To failings mild, but zealous for desert;  
 The clearest head, and the sincerest heart.

This humble praise, lamented shade! receive,  
 This praise at least a grateful Muse may give: 734  
 The Muse, whose early voice you taught to sing,  
 Prescrib'd her heights, and prun'd her tender wing,  
 (Her guide now lost) no more attempts to rise,  
 But in low numbers short excursions tries:  
 Content, if hence th' unlearn'd their wants may view,  
 'The learn'd reflect on what before they knew: 740

60 ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

Careless of censure, nor too fond of fame;  
Still pleas'd to praise, yet not afraid to blame;  
Averse alike to flatter, or offend;  
Not free from faults, nor yet too vain to mend.



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